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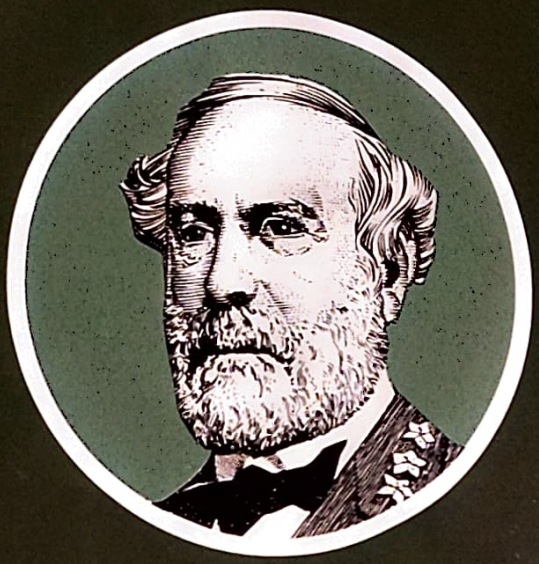


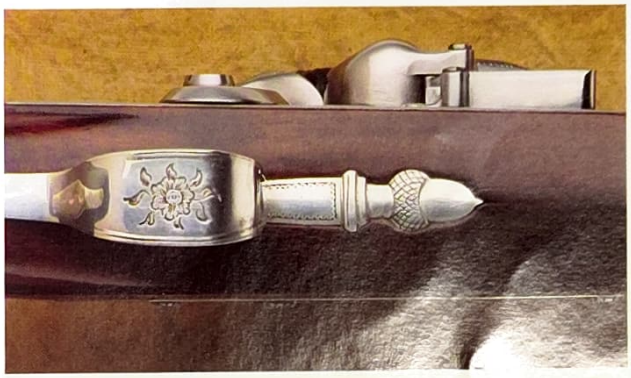
THE WASHINGTON AND LEE SILVER-MOUNTED FLINTLOCK PISTOLS

An Official Issue of the United States Historical Society
in cooperation with Washington and Lee University

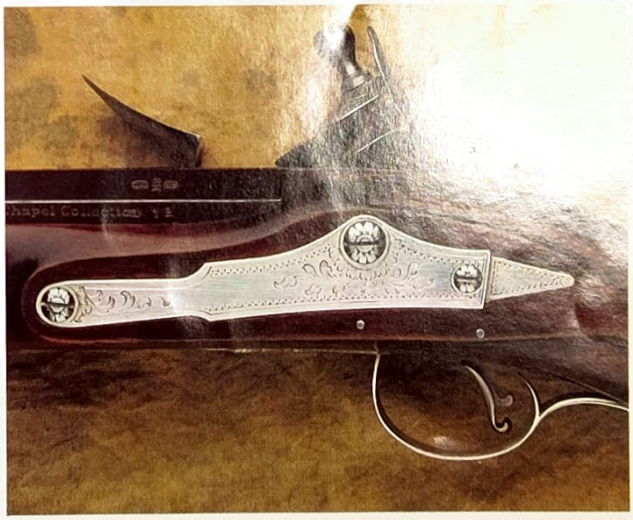
The United States Historical Society's museum-quality, firing reproductions of the only pistols owned by both General George Washington and General Robert E. Lee.

Butt Cap *Cast in sterling silver, the ornate butt cap is the largest of all the seven silver parts of the gun. The Acanthus flower is repeated as the decorative theme, with a drum and banner design on both sides.*

Lock Assembly *Note the smooth finish and careful attention to detail. Floral designs and borders are hand-engraved. The lock interior is machined and finished in the same precise manner.*



Trigger Guard *The sterling silver trigger guard and tang extend under the rich walnut stock for 6 total inches. The Acanthus flower is hand-engraved, as is the acorn pattern on the finial.*



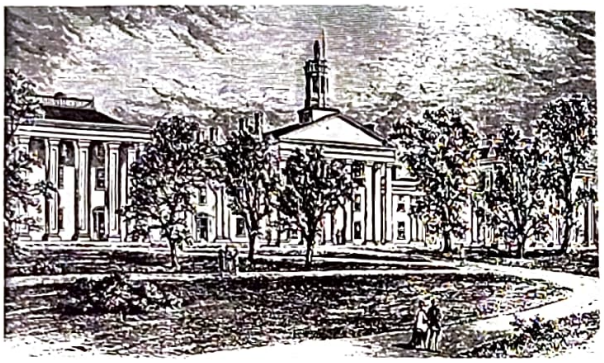
Side Plate *The side plate is hand-engraved with an intricate floral pattern, characteristic of English design in the mid-1700s. A lintel border surrounds the plate which is cut out of an ⅛″ thick solid sterling silver sheet. Screw heads are also hand engraved.*

PROVENANCE

George Washington was a hunter and firearms expert from his youth. Evidence from his private diary indicates that he may have owned as many as 50 firearms during his vigorous career as a frontiersman, military leader, sportsman and hunter. Authentic records of his firearms acquisitions date back at least as far as 1760 when, at the age of 28, he ordered "a Prussian dragoon."

Like many other gun owners, he wanted the best money could buy. A strong-box found among his effects upon his death indicates the value he placed on his firearms, keeping them under lock and key to avoid theft. His pistols show a quality and elaborateness in keeping with the status of a Virginia gentleman.

The inventory of George Washington's estate indicated that he owned four pair of pistols prior to his death. Three pair survive. Of these, none has a more interesting history and provenance than the ones held in trust by Washington and Lee University.



Martha Dandridge Custis was a young widow with two children when she met and married George Washington. When her son, John Parke Custis, died, the Washington's adopted his two children.

George Washington gave the pair of muzzle loading silver-mounted pistols now at Washington and Lee University to his adopted son, George Washington Parke Custis, who later married Mary Lee Fitzhugh. Their daughter, Mary Anna Randolph Custis, married Robert E. Lee at Arlington House in June 1831. The famous pistols passed to Robert E. Lee through the Custis family. Washington and Lee University received the pistols from Dr. George Boling Lee, grandson of General Lee.

Robert E. Lee was so highly regarded as a soldier that, when the War Between the States broke out, Abraham Lincoln offered him the command of all Federal forces. His heart was with his family in Virginia, however, and he resigned his commission in the United States Army to become commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. After the surrender to General Grant on April 9, 1865, General Lee returned for awhile to Richmond where he received numerous offers for positions in industry. Instead, he accepted the presidency of Washington College, now Washington and Lee University.

Today, the original Washington and Lee Flintlock Pistols are proudly displayed in the Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. An appraisal of their value has not been made, but the Antique Arms Committee of the Society estimates their value in excess of one million dollars.

CRAFTSMANSHIP

Each of the original flintlocks is 16″ long and nearly .70 caliber. The steel barrels are 9 15/16 inches long with 5″ x 1″ lockplates. The "P" and "V" under the Crown marks are the proof and view marks used by Birmingham gunmakers prior to 1813. The "MB" mark indicates the pistols were made by Mathias (Matthew) Barker, presumably between 1766 and 1774. Barker was a merchant in addition to a gunmaker and barrel maker and had an export trade with America.

The pistols have burl walnut stocks and rich solid silver fittings. These include acorn trigger-guard finials, carved clamshells on wood and escutcheon plates which are typical of fine silver work of the mid-1700s. The engraving is all by hand and highly detailed.

The Washington and Lee flintlocks are among the finest examples of the gunsmith's art. They are the largest pistols, both in length and caliber, from General Washington's surviving effects.

The reproductions offered are exact, full-scale working reproductions of the original Washington silver-mounted flintlock pistols. They are made under the direct supervision of the gunsmiths of the United States Historical Society's Antique Arms Committee.

The authorized reproductions are of the same materials and manufactured with the same meticulous craftsmanship as the originals. After proof firing, each barrel is fitted into the full-length select walnut stock which has been hand carved around the barrel tang and relief carved to receive the intricate, sculptured, heavy silver inlays.

The seven engraved silver inlays in each pistol are reproduced by the ancient da Vinci lost wax (cire perdue) process, the same method employed by silver and goldsmiths since Benvenuto Cellini.

An optional presentation case is crafted of velvet-lined, mahogany, as were pistols of the period. Corner compartments hold extra leathers and flints.

REGISTRATION AND CERTIFICATION

The Washington and Lee silver-mounted flintlock pistols are being issued in a limited edition of 1,000 pair. When the edition is complete, all dies and tooling will be destroyed in the presence of witnesses from the United States Historical Society.

Each pair will be numbered and registered. A Certificate of Authenticity will accompany each pair. The sets are offered without priority to museums, historical societies, other institutions, dealers, private collectors and interested individuals.

RESERVATIONS

To reserve your pair of the Washington and Lee Flintlock Pistols, please return the enclosed reservations application with your deposit. Your reservation will be confirmed promptly, and you will be notified of the Registry Number assigned to you and the estimated date of shipment.

The Washington and Lee Pistols are issued by the United States Historical Society, a private, non-governmental organization dedicated to historical research and the sponsorship of projects and issuance of objects which are artistically and historically significant.

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